

Pre-Departure Orientation (March 22, 2025)

Students prepared for the program through a half-day orientation hosted by the University Study Abroad Office, where they connected with peers studying abroad across the globe. In breakout sessions hosted by the teaching team, students received program-specific onboarding: budget, billing, financial aid, grading policy, health and safety protocols, and instructor expectations. Pre-departure sessions also addressed how study abroad intersects with different identities and abilities, offering resources to support diverse student needs.

Our community partner, Yunus Thailand, developed a customized pre-departure booklet filled with resources specific to the Thai context for students. These materials challenged cultural stereotypes, emphasized what it means to be an ethical student and visitor, and highlighted the perspectives and histories of marginalized groups. Students were introduced to the work of Professor Muhammad Yunus, whose scholarship on social entrepreneurship invites them to interrogate traditional economic systems and reimagine their roles as globally engaged learners.

The students were also given an overview of our academic program and the high expectations we have set for them in engaging in community-engaged projects and reflection. Students were told they would be engaged in academic content, assignments, and projects that require them to consider equity, ethics, and responsibility in international education.

Pre-Departure Dinner (April 27, 2025)

Students and the teaching team shared a homecooked meal alongside program alumni, highlighting the long-term community that extends beyond a single summer. Alumni facilitated community-building activities and an informal Q&A for the students to give them space to ask questions and envision their own trajectory within the program. The faculty outlined expectations for ethically grounded teamwork with community partners and modeled authentic reflection by sharing their own Story of Self. This demonstration introduced students to the reflective framework they will carry abroad and supported them in drafting the beginnings of their own Story of Self prior to departure.

Day 1: Arrival and Orientation in Bangkok (June 1, 2025)

Students arrive in Bangkok and check in to the hotel.

Day 2: Participatory Rubric Creation and Orientation to Thailand through Hidden Histories and Sex Education

The day included a cultural and safety orientation led by the teaching team and the collaborative creation of a participation rubric that reflects shared values, responsibilities, and intentions for ethical community engagement. This rubric was explicitly framed through intercultural learning

and civic engagement frameworks, ensuring all students (across diverse backgrounds and learning needs) could help shape equitable ground rules. The student-generated participation rubric ensured that students had an active role and responsibility in the learning community and began breaking down the power dynamic between faculty and students. Having students create the participation rubric allowed them to foreground their own strengths, expectations, and needs.

The day ended with a ‘Hidden Beliefs’ walking tour led by Roots Routes, a social business revealing the overlooked pieces of the social fabric of Bangkok. Our reflection prompts for the first week (both verbal, written, and arts-based) invited students to analyze how their assumptions about Bangkok were unsettled, which connected to program learning objectives around critical global awareness and perspective-taking.

Dinner was hosted at the Cabbages & Condoms restaurant, a social enterprise co-founded by Thai health pioneer Mechai Viravaidya who spoke with the students. Through provocative decor and public health messaging, students learned how this restaurant supported a nationwide campaign of condom distribution to destigmatize sexual health and promote health equity in Thailand.

Day 3: Social Business and Language Learning

Students began the day with a lecture from leaders of Yunus Thailand, who introduced their organization, community partners, and social business model.

In the afternoon, they participated in a Thai language lesson taught by a professor from our partner, Mae Fah Luang University.

That evening, students participated in a 3-hour critical and collective reflection session to share their personal 'Stories of Self' that they prepared prior to arriving in Thailand.

Day 4: Waste Economies and Environmental Systems

The day began with a field visit to an international, industrial recycling facility, where students observed the full process of how a plastic bottle is recycled and participated in a Q&A with facility employees. The visit was intentionally scheduled before the next day’s trips to the Zero Baht Shop to introduce students to the circular economy of waste and gently disorient their assumptions.

In the afternoon, students had lunch at a student-operated vegan restaurant at Mahidol University International College (MUIC) in Bangkok and explored the nutrition and food sciences lab, engaging with local students to create their own spice kits and understand more of the Thai higher education context.

Day 5: Tangerine Health Clinic for Trans-focused Care and the Zero-Baht Shop in the Waste Picker Community

The day began with a visit to Tangerine Clinic, Southeast Asia's first trans-led, trans-focused health clinic and a regional leader in inclusive HIV care. Students learned how the clinic models equity-centered health services through gender-affirming care and culturally responsive outreach.

They toured the clinic, heard from a staff member about their personal experience, and grappled with the severe impact of lost USAID and NIH funding on the clinic's ability to serve the community, engaging in a difficult conversation with staff about these challenges. The group reflection encouraged students to examine their assumptions about gender, health, and justice and connect these insights to civic responsibility and intercultural empathy.

In the afternoon, students shifted their focus to back to the waste economy and community empowerment through a visit to a Zero Baht Shop, which is a grassroots, community-based initiative where recyclables are exchanged for daily essentials. Students learned how this model transforms waste into social value and supports low-income residents.

The day concluded with a presentation from a community leader of the waste picker network, highlighting the expertise, resilience, and dignity of workers often overlooked in the recycling economy. By juxtaposing institutional infrastructure (recycling facility visit) with informal labor systems (waste picker community), students confronted the full economic chain of waste and the structural inequalities embedded within it.

Through site visits to Tangerine Health Clinic and the Zero-Baht Shop, students practiced applying civic and intercultural learning frameworks, analyzing how health, labor, and sustainability intersect in Thai contexts.

In the evening, students attended a networking event at a restaurant that supports teenage international refugees with UNC-CH alumni and local community partners.

Day 6: Justice-Oriented Entrepreneurship in Food Systems and Reproductive Justice and Safe Abortion Access

The day began with an eclectic and esteemed panel of Thai social entrepreneurs working in food justice and nutrition (Jasberry Rice, Global Foodbank Network, and SATI Foundation). Students were able to have engage with the speakers as a whole group, in small groups, and one-on-one.

In the afternoon, students visited the Thailand Population and Development Association, where community leaders shared the complex history of advocacy for safe abortion and reproductive rights. Students had the optional opportunity to visit a local abortion clinic to hear directly from doctors about what it is like to work on the ground.

In the evening, students met with their Yunus project mentors to work on their team projects and engage more deeply with social issues they were being exposed to through dialogue and insights from community experts.

Day 7: Travel and Transition

Students checked out and enjoyed a free day before departing Bangkok via overnight sleeper train (13 hours) to Chiang Mai. This transition time was treated as intentional space for students to rest, reflect, explore, and work on team projects.

Day 8: Arrival in Chiang Mai

Students arrived in Chiang Mai early morning and had a rest day.

The teaching team gave students' feedback on their reflection journal entries to ensure that students were thoughtfully and critically engaging with the prompts and questions both through their writing and their art.

Day 9: Free Day in Chiang Mai

This transition day also provided students with dedicated time to continue developing their community-engaged projects and receive formative feedback from the teaching team and Yunus project mentors on their early ideas to ensure their work remains aligned with program's learning objectives, but more importantly, the needs of the communities.

Day 10: Chiang Rai's Akha Ama Coffee and Indigenous Community Empowerment

In the morning, students traveled to Chiang Rai to meet with the founder of Akha Ama, a community-driven social enterprise rooted in coffee production and Akha indigenous identity. This visit was intended to prepare students for their immersive two-day, two-night experience in an Akha farming and coffee growing village. Students learned about the intersection of ethnic identity and ethical enterprise, exploring how social business can promote economic development, support social mobility, and foster responsible partnerships with farmers and local communities.

In the afternoon and evening, students were given dedicated time to rest, reflect, explore, and work on team projects.

Day 11: Mae Fah Luang University (MFU) Kick-Off

In the morning, our students attended interactive academic lectures alongside MFU university students on highland communities and the climate politics of the Mekong River hosted by MFU's School of Management. Topics included indigenous ecological knowledge, shifting agricultural practices, and regional conservation efforts.

In the afternoon, the group participated in a student-led university tour led by a team of MFU undergraduates and graduate students. This experience allowed students to explore the campus while engaging in meaningful cross-cultural dialogue, building connections that enhanced their understanding of global perspectives and student life in Thailand.

In the evening, students were given dedicated time to rest, reflect, explore, and work on team projects.

Day 12: Pangkhon Village Immersion Begins

In the morning, UNC and MFU students traveled by van through the mountains to Pangkhon Village (an Akha village) to engage directly with community leaders and coffee farmers. Through storytelling, shared meals, and community visits, they explored local agricultural practices, nutrition, and food systems, while reflecting on public health implications and what it means to be ethical learners in someone else's home community.

In the afternoon, students, in groups of five, participated in community visits to various sites highlighting contemporary agricultural challenges, successes, and innovations. They then returned for a one-hour group reflection session at the village's local coffee shop, discussing what they learned, observed, and felt.

In the evening, everyone came together for a shared meal featuring traditional Akha food and seating, followed by free time to play games and share stories.

Students stayed overnight in a village homestay to partially experience life in the village firsthand and continue reflecting on intercultural learning and ethical civic engagement.

Day 13: Co-learning Workshops in the Pangkhon Village

In the morning and afternoon, MFU professors and community experts in Pangkhon Village hosted workshops that invited UNC and MFU students to participate in daily Akha life, including meal preparation, crafting, and farming. These co-learning experiences with American and Thai students were framed through intercultural learning and civic engagement frameworks.

Students applied design-thinking principles to develop potential solutions to community-identified challenges and presented their ideas to classmates, faculty, MFU students, and community members. Presentations were evaluated for critical thinking and responsiveness to community needs. MFU faculty and community leaders provided formative feedback to ensure student work met both academic and community standards. These co-learning sessions explicitly challenged traditional power dynamics of intercultural learning and civic engagement by centering community expertise in the classroom, rather than relying solely on faculty disciplinary knowledge.

In the evening, students came together to enjoy a traditional Akha dinner and cultural activities to reflect and connect informally. Students stayed overnight in a village homestay.

Day 14: Ecotourism and Regional History

In the morning, after departing the village, students visited key sites in the Golden Triangle, including the Chiang Saen National Museum. Reflection sessions focused on sustainable tourism and the evolving socio-political landscape of northern Thailand.

UNC and MFU students said goodbye to one another, and UNC students returned to Chiang Rai. In the evening, students were given dedicated time to rest, reflect, explore, and work on team projects.

Day 15: Mid-Point Reflection Session and Return to Bangkok

In the morning, students reflected on the Pangkhon village immersion experience in a facilitated group dialogue informed by Megan Boler's pedagogy of discomfort. Multiple modalities (e.g. oral dialogue, written journaling, and arts-based expression) were used to capture reflection, ensuring accessibility across learning styles. Prompts explicitly connected emotional dissonance to program learning objectives such as ethical community engagement, intercultural learning, and civic responsibility. Feedback was provided by peers and faculty, reinforcing collective accountability.

The midpoint check-in helped students synthesize their experiences thus far, set personal and academic goals for what they hoped to gain from the remainder of the program, and reflect on whether they needed to make any changes in how they were showing up each day.

Students received targeted feedback on their community-engaged projects from the teaching team and Yunus Thailand mentors. This midpoint check-in allowed students to recalibrate both their learning and project trajectory.

The teaching team also provided feedback on students' reflection journal entries to ensure they were thoughtfully and critically engaging with the prompts and questions through both writing and art.

In the afternoon, students had designated work time for their individual assignments and team projects before flying back to Bangkok.

Students also had time to meet one-on-one with the teaching team to discuss the development of their Story of Self Part II Assignment.

Day 16: Community Project Work & Rest

This open day in Bangkok provided students with dedicated time to continue developing their community-engaged projects and receive formative feedback from the teaching team and Yunus project mentors on their early ideas to ensure their work remains aligned with program's learning objectives, but more importantly, the needs of the communities. This time allowed for rest, reflection, and exploration.

Day 17: Travel to Satun Province

In the morning, the students flew to Satun Province, a rural, predominately Muslim, southern region in Thailand.

In the afternoon, students visit Mu Ko Phetra National Park to participate in cultural activities with the national park employees.

In the evening, students settled into their hotel accommodations and continued working on their individual assignments and team projects.

Day 18: Marine Research and Cooking with Community Entrepreneurs

In the morning, students visited the Satun Marine Research Center to learn from local women scientists about marine species, conservation efforts, and the connections between sustainable fisheries and local food systems. Engagement with women scientists at the Satun Marine Research Center was guided by an ethic of respect for local expertise in a context where women's contributions in science are often marginalized.

In the afternoon, students learned from a local community-oriented social business entrepreneur at Wasina Farm, and how they have created a sustainable, organic aquaculture model of local species including seaweed, crab, shrimp, and fish.

In the evening, students participated in a cooking class taught by a local community tourism enterprise spearheaded by Muslim female entrepreneurs working in the seaweed industry.

Day 19: Yunus Thailand's Seaweed Social Business

In the morning, students met with female leaders of Yunus Thailand's Seaweed Social Business initiative, exploring how rural entrepreneurship can drive social and environmental change. They examined systems thinking in practice and gained insight into the interconnected challenges of sustainable business, community/economic development, and gender equity.

In the afternoon, students chose between a nature excursion to one of the oldest caves in Thailand or a local snack-making workshop.

In the evening, students engaged with Yunus project mentors to refine their project ideas and receive feedback.

Day 20: Mangrove Restoration with Elementary Students and Fisherfolk and Local Art Making

In the morning, students engaged in hands-on, experiential learning at a mangrove restoration site, getting muddy and planting mangroves alongside local fisherfolk and elementary school students. This activity allowed them to apply civic engagement principles while enhancing their own intercultural learning by engaging in and reflecting on collaboration, community responsibility, and the role of local knowledge in environmental stewardship.

Later, students heard from community elders and leaders who have guided the economic development of local fisherfolk in Satun for decades. They toured the mangrove canals and rivers by boat, gaining firsthand insight into the community's environmental and economic landscape.

In the afternoon, students participated in a batik painting workshop led by a social enterprise that uses local handicrafts to promote cultural preservation and economic development. Students created their own batik paintings while reflecting on the ways traditional arts can support community resilience and sustainable livelihoods.

In the evening, students were given dedicated time to rest, reflect, explore, and work on team projects.

Day 21: Reflection Session in Satun and Market Visit

In the morning, students reflected on their experiences, alongside faculty and Yunus community partners, in Satun through a facilitated group discussion informed by Megan Boler's pedagogy of discomfort and collective witnessing. They shared disorienting dilemmas they had encountered throughout the program. This reflection session provided a space to pause and take stock of their own intercultural and civic learning and the emotions and challenges that arose from it. All participants, including community leaders, were invited to be vulnerable, observe how they were showing up each day, and consider what shifts might help them engage more fully and meaningfully in the weeks ahead.

In the afternoon, students were driven to Hat Yai and given the opportunity to visit a floating market to engage with local vendors and regional products.

In the evening, students were given dedicated time to rest, reflect, explore, and work on team projects.

The teaching team also provided feedback on students' reflection journal entries to ensure they were thoughtfully and critically engaging with the prompts and questions through both writing and art.

Students also had time to meet one-on-one with the teaching team to discuss the development of their Story of Self Part II Assignment.

Day 22: First Free Day in Songkhla

This open day in Songkhla provided students with dedicated time to continue developing their community-engaged projects and receive formative feedback from the teaching team and Yunus project mentors on their projects to ensure their work remains aligned with program's learning

objectives, but more importantly, the needs of the communities. This time allowed for rest, reflection, and exploration.

Students also had time to meet one-on-one with the teaching team to discuss the development of their Story of Self Part II Assignment.

Day 23: Second Free Day in Songkhla

This open day in Songkhla provided students with dedicated time to continue developing their community-engaged projects and receive formative feedback from the teaching team and Yunus project mentors on their projects to ensure their work remains aligned with program's learning objectives, but more importantly, the needs of the communities. This time allowed for rest, reflection, and exploration.

Students also had time to meet one-on-one with the teaching team to discuss the development of their Story of Self Part II Assignment.

Day 24: Travel and Workday

Before flying back to Bangkok, students had dedicated time to continue developing their community-engaged projects and receive formative feedback from the teaching team and Yunus project mentors on their projects to ensure their work remains aligned with program's learning objectives, but more importantly, the needs of the communities. This time allowed for rest, reflection, and exploration.

Day 25: Final Project Showcase

Students presented their culminating projects with Yunus Thailand and other community partners in attendance. Presentations were hosted at Yellow Lane, a Bangkok-based social enterprise that serves as a platform for dialogue and creative expression in the Ari District. Students received thoughtful questions and critical feedback (oral and written) from the teaching team and community partners. Specifically, community partner feedback was integrated as an assessment mechanism to intentionally position host partners as evaluators of student learning alongside faculty.

In the evening, Yunus Thailand and UNC-Chapel Hill formally announced the launch of UNC's Yunus Center, which will open on our campus in Fall 2025.

Day 26: Exit Interviews and Closing Reflection

In the morning, each student presented Part II of their Story of Self and a culminating reflection session, sharing how the program had transformed their worldviews and influenced their professional trajectories. The four-hour session concluded with a community-building activity, where students exchanged affirmations and said their goodbyes.

Throughout the day, students met one-on-one for exit interviews with the teaching team to provide feedback and share personal reflections on their experiences.

The teaching team also gave students extensive written feedback on their community-engaged group projects, their participation throughout the program using the student-generated rubric, and reflections on students' Stories of Self.

Day 27: Departure Day

Students checked out and departed Bangkok.